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BLOFIELD RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT of the Medical Officer of Health for the year 1907

To the Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen of the
Blofield Rural District Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I beg to present the following report on the health and sanitary condition of your District for the year 1907.

POPULATION

Basing my calculations on the fact that the population of the District at the census of 1901 showed that a decrease at the average rate of 30 per annum had taken place during the previous ten years, and surmising that the depopulation of the District has continued at the same rate since that period. I estimate the population at the middle of 1907 to be 19,748. This figure does not include the population of about 1000 in the County Asylum.

BIRTHS :-

The number of births registered was 249, which gives a birth-rate of 23.2. By referring to Table 1 it will be seen that both the number of births and the birth-rate are below the average of the last ten years. The number of female exceeded the number of male children born by as many as 39.

Fourteen births of illegitimate children were registered. This is less than in 1906 but still above the average.

DEATHS:

The total number of deaths registered was 132, exactly 20 below the average for the last ten years. The death-rate stands at 12.2 a record but for the remarkably low death-rate of the previous year when it was 11.4. Such a satisfactory death-rate for two years in succession is a matter for much congratulation.

INFANT MORTALITY :-

In my Report for the year 1906 I had the satisfaction of recording an exceptionally short death roll of infants under one year, and I am glad the figures for this year show that this happy decline in the mortality among infants has been maintained in the District.

It is difficult to assign a cause for this improvement unless we may infer that the efforts made of late years to educate the working class mother in the proper way of bringing up her family are at last beginning to bear fruit.

Following the suggestion made in my Report for last year the Registrars of births in this District have been supplied with copies of the pamphlet compiled by Miss Bernard Boyce, the Lady Inspector of Midwives for the county. At the time of the registration of a birth one of these pamphlets, which contain useful and practical information on the subject of the care of infants, has been presented to the mother, and it cannot be doubted but that these timely gifts have contributed to the lowering of our infant mortality. Its effect would of course be more felt were the Early Notification of Births Act adopted in the District, which would make it possible for the pamphlets to be supplied immediately on the birth of every infant.



During 1907 only 20 deaths occurred among children under one year and with the births numbering 249 the infant mortality per 1000 births stands at 80. In 1906 the number of deaths was 19 and the rate 78 per 1000 births, while the average for the previous ten years was 29 deaths and a rate of 108 per 1000 births.

In a rural district it is rare to find the infant mortality rate below 100 while in towns it frequently rises to above 200 per 1000 births.

OLD AGE MORTALITY.

More than 50% of the total deaths registered were of persons over 65 years of age, and as many as 19 outlived their four score years. This speaks well for the longevity of the inhabitants of the district

ZYMOTIC DISEASE

The past year has been marked by an unusual number of cases of diphtheria, a disease from which the District was almost entirely free in 1906. This sudden incidence of diphtheria will, I believe, be found common to other districts in the County, and is to be attributed more to general meteorological conditions than to local defects in sanitation.

The total number of notifications of all infectious disease received during the year was 35. This is below the average for the last ten years (49)

Table showing the nature and locality of Zymotic Disease notified during the year.

| Locality | Enteric. | Diphtheria. | Scarlet Fever | Erysipelas. | Total. |
|----------------------------|----------|-------------|------------------|-------------|--------|
| Asylum. | | | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| Beighton | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Brundall | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Burlingham | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Freethorpe | | 5 | | | 5 |
| Halvergate | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Hemblington | | 1 | | 2 | 3 |
| Limpenhoe | 1 | 2 | | | 3 |
| Lingwood | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Norwich (County Police) | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Plumstead (Gt.) | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Reedham | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Thorpe | | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Upton | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Walsham (Sth) | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Woodbastwick | | | 1 | | 1 |
| Workhouse | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Total | 2 | 13 | 12 | 8 | 35 |

Scarlet Fever.

Disregarding the four cases notified from the County

Asylum, the remaining eight cases were distributed through six different parishes, and each one of the eight was entirely independent of the others. That is to say infection was introduced at eight distinct points in the District, but that in no single instance did it spread beyond the primary case. This is somewhat remarkable having regard to the fact that the District is unprovided with an Isolation Hospital.

Diphtheria.

Thirteen cases were notified, but it was only in the parishes of Limpenhoe and Freethorpe that the disease assumed epidemic form.

At Limpenhoe two children were found suffering from definite diphtheria, and as there were several others who were or had been, affected with suspicious sore throats, I advised the immediate closure of the school. As far as circumstances admitted the cases were isolated, and the school was thoroughly disinfected according to the scheme of the Norfolk Education Committee. These and other measures that were taken were successful in arresting the course of the epidemic and no other cases occurred.

The Freethorpe outbreak was more serious and resulted in the loss of two children. There is little doubt that diphtheria existed for some time before medical aid was sought by the parents, so that when the first case was discovered the infection had already been spread. This fact added to the local prejudice against the use of anti-toxin made it difficult to deal with this epidemic.

A special report was presented at the time on this outbreak which dealt more particularly with the necessity of reconstructing the main drain of the parish. This important work has now been satisfactorily completed.

Of the remaining cases there is nothing to be said beyond that for the most part, they were of a mild type and that the infection did not spread.

Enteric Fever.

There were but two cases of this disease notified during the year. In the Reedham case there was no clue to the source of infection, but the cottage occupied by the patient was one of a row of six known as "The Barracks" and situated on marshy ground between two slight elevations, a most unhealthy spot.

The origin of the case at Limpenhoe was more easily traced. Here again the cottage was situated on low ground, being not more than a few inches above the level of the marsh and supplied by a surface water well. The father of the patient had suffered from enteric a year previously, and at that time the water in the well was condemned as unfit for drinking purposes. In spite of warnings the young man was in the habit of drinking the polluted water and, as a consequence contracted the disease. A pure supply was available close by.

Neither of these two cases were fatal.

Measles

The District has been almost entirely free from this disease during the year.

Whooping Cough.

Few cases have come under my notice, and no deaths have been registered as due to this disease.

Anthrax.

Two cases of Anthrax in cattle have been notified to me during the year. In each case the carcass and all pertaining thereto was cremated and thorough disinfection carried out by the Inspector under the Board of Agriculture. The disease did not spread to human beings.

These cases were interesting from a public health point of view owing to the fact that in both instances the beast was killed on the premises of the farm where it was attacked with the disease, and the Inspector, on his arrival on the scene, found the carcass ready dressed for sale. Under slightly different circumstances these carcasses might have been placed on the market and offered for sale as food for human consumption.

A regulation requiring a certificate from a veterinary surgeon, in all cases where a beast was slaughtered in any place but a registered slaughter house, would be a protection to the public; and in some instances, especially in cases of anthrax, a means of checking the spread of disease among animals.

VACCINATION

In the Blofield Sub-District.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Primary Vaccinations | 114 |
| Exempted under Conscience Clause. | 10 |
| Summonses | 0 |
| Re-vaccinations by Public Vaccinator | 1 |

In the South Walsham Sub-District

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Primary Vaccinations | 101 |
| Exempted under Conscience Clause | 3 |
| Summonses | 0 |
| Re-vaccinations by Public Vaccinator | 0 |

The number of primary vaccinations has somewhat declined but this is accounted for by a corresponding decline in the number of births.

There were but thirteen children exempted under the Conscience Clause.

Re-Vaccination continues to be a dead letter.

Sanitary Condition of the District.

With the close of the year Mr. Overed, who has acted as Inspector of Nuisances in the District for thirty five years, was compelled through advancing years and declining health to resign his office. For the past twenty four years I have been associated with Mr. Overed as Medical Officer of Health and desire to take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the thoroughly conscientious way he carried out his work during that time. Mr. Overed made no great display of what he did, but he has left behind him the best possible evidence of the value of his work in the greatly improved sanitary condition of the District.

His successor, Mr. Claude King, is a member of the Sanitary Institute, and possesses all the technical knowledge and practical experience of a trained sanitary engineer. Mr. King is moreover full of enthusiasm and energy, and has the great advantage of being a cyclist. There still remains much work to be done, and I look forward with pleasure to a period of renewed sanitary activity in the District.

Report of the Inspector of Nuisances.

The Inspector sends me the following list of matters dealt with during the year 1907.

| | |
|--|------------|
| New Dwelling houses | 12 |
| " Wells | 6 |
| " privies | 9 |
| Disinfecting dwellings & Schools | 7 |
| Inspecting dairies, milk shops & butcheries | 21 |
| Inspecting cow sheds & piggeries | 24 |
| Cleaning out wells | 5 |
| " " drains, catchpits & privies | 19 |
| Removal of filth & manure | 23 |
| " " garbage & decaying matters | 17 |
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Water Supply.

The water supply of the District undergoes but little variation from year to year. The source of supply is from private wells. Some of these are deep and provide an ample supply of water of excellent quality. In the low lying parts of the District surface water wells are the rule and are subject to a variety of dangers of pollution according to their situation. There still exist in the District many wells which become polluted from leaves and other matters falling into them through being unprotected by a cover.

Drainage

My annual report is seldom without a record of work accomplished in this direction, and during the past year attention has been given to the improvement of the drainage of several of the larger villages in the District.



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Acle Owing mainly to the erection of new houses increasing the volume of the sewage carried by the main drain of the Northern part of this village, a somewhat serious nuisance arose at the outfall of the drain. The matter, which formed the subject of a special report, was taken in hand by your Council assisted by a local committee, and as a result the outfall has been removed a considerable distance further East. In its present position it is unlikely to be a source of danger or nuisance to any of the inhabitants of the village.

In connection with this work, in addition to a number of inspection chambers, in the course of the drain, a large intercepting tank has been constructed and proper ventilation provided by means of a shaft.

Thorpe St. Andrew. The Parochial Committee of this are taking steps to provide a system of sewerage and have considered a scheme prepared by Mr. Arthur J. Martin M.Inst.C.E. It is hoped the work will be carried out during the Summer.

Freethorpe. The construction of a new drain in this village has already been referred to in connection with an outbreak of diphtheria. The drain is over 400 yards long, and is provided with six inspection chambers, and a large covered catchpit. Ventilation is secured by an air shaft at the head of the drain. The outfall is into a pond without an outlet, which cannot be considered altogether satisfactory. At some future time it may be found practicable to extend the drain further East and secure an outfall which will be free from objection.

Cottage Accommodation.

The small amount of building that has taken place in the District of late years has been chiefly in the direction of providing house accommodation for the class above the agricultural labourer.

Where farms form part of large estates, good cottages, sufficient in number for the labourers employed, are generally to be found, but in parishes where the property is sub-divided insanitary dwellings are the rule. The agricultural labourer has to content himself with the cottage accommodation as he finds it, his wages not being sufficiently large to allow him to pay a rental which would tempt the speculating builder to provide him with a modern cottage.

There are cottages of a class, some few examples of which exist in your District, which are in such a state of dilapidation that the owners feel justified in spending only the smallest possible amount on their repair. In this class of cottage the roof is often not altogether weather-proof; the walls and floor are damp through absence of eaves guttering; there is an insecurity about the bulging walls; and the bedroom, situated in the pitch of the roof with insufficient air space, is found ventilated only by a window on the level of the floor. The difficulty met with in dealing satisfactorily with such an obvious case of an insanitary cottage is very great. The argument advanced for leaving property of this description alone is that such a cottage is not worth putting into a proper state of repair, and that to pull it down would only result in depriving a labourer and his family of their only available shelter. I respectfully submit this difficult problem to the consideration of the Council.

Milk Supply

The supervision of the milk supplied from the District to the towns to which it is consigned, as well as the milk supply of the District itself, is a matter of grave importance and has received due attention from myself and the Inspector of Nuisances during the past year.

Your District is most favourably situated for the development of a large milk industry. It is traversed through its entire length by two lines of railway and has on its Western and Eastern boundaries two very accessible markets in the City of Norwich, and the town of Yarmouth. It contains a large acreage of grass land in extensive marshes, while the uplands are famed for their production of root crops. With these natural advantages it is not surprising to find that Dairy Farming is receiving more attention, and that, in order to meet the demand of the ever increasing town populations, fresh dairies are springing up in the District.

In May 1905 Regulations with respect to Dairies and Cow Sheds were adopted for the District, and in the course of that year I made a personal inspection of the dairies coming under these regulations. In a report which followed I felt bound to confess that "viewed in the light of the new Bye-Laws, it becomes evident that, with one or two notable exceptions, there is not a properly constructed cow shed or dairy in the District." Since that date improvements have been effected in some of the dairies on the register, and at the present time one of the largest and most important dairies in the District is undergoing almost complete reconstruction. There remain however many dairies where the premises are so faulty that very extensive alterations, amounting in some instances almost to reconstruction, are required before they will comply with the Regulations you have adopted. In the course of the coming Summer I hope to present a report giving a detailed description of the premises of all the Dairies on the Register in order that you may be placed in a position to judge how best to deal with them.

REEDHAM

There has been but one case of infectious disease notified from this Parish during the year. This was a case of Enteric Fever which occurred in a row of cottages known as "The Barracks" which although the cottages themselves are well constructed are most unfortunately situated on low lying ground, making proper drainage a matter of great difficulty. The source of infection could not be discovered.

The population of Reedham is estimated for the middle of 1907 to be 802. The number of births was 13 and deaths 12. This gives a birth-rate of only 16, while the death-rate stands at 14.9 per 1000 population.

THORPE VILLAGE

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| Population Census 1891 | 1,317 (without Asylum) |
| " " 1901 | 1,507 (") |
| Average Annual rate of increase 19. | |
| Estimated population middle of 1907 - 1630 | |
| Births 28 | Birth-rate 17.1 |
| Deaths 10 | Death-rate 6.1 |

Among the ten deaths was one of an infant a few days old. The average age of the remaining nine was over 73 years. There were no deaths from infectious disease.

Table showing death-rate etc. for past 10 years.

| Year | Estimated population | Number of Deaths | Death-rate | Zymotic Death-rate | Death-rate for whole District |
|---------|----------------------|------------------|------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1898 | 1450 | 17 | 11.6 | 0.7 | 14.7 |
| 1899 | 1469 | 12 | 8.1 | 0.0 | 12.5 |
| 1900 | 1488 | 26 | 17.4 | 0.0 | 14.6 |
| 1901 | 1507 | 18 | 11.9 | 0.0 | 14.4 |
| 1902 | 1531 | 18 | 11.9 | 0.0 | 13.3 |
| 1903 | 1550 | 26 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 13.6 |
| 1904 | 1570 | 22 | 14.0 | 0.0 | 14.1 |
| 1905 | 1590 | 21 | 13.2 | 0.0 | 13.3 |
| 1906 | 1610 | 12 | 7.4 | 0.0 | 11.4 |
| 1907 | 1630 | 10 | 6.1 | 0.0 | 12.2 |
| Average | 1540 | 18 | 11.8 | 0.07 | 13.4 |

It will be seen by this Table that there have been but very few deaths in Thorpe for the last two years, and that, for the past year the death-rate fell to the remarkably low figure of 6.1, being exactly half that for the whole District. It is possible that this exceptionally low death-rate, gratifying as it is, may have resulted from accidental circumstances as the figures dealt with are small; but the Table also shows that the average death-rate for the parish of Thorpe, when ten years are taken, is lower than that for the whole District by nearly two points, a fact of much greater significance.

Scarlet Fever.

Three cases of Scarlet Fever were notified in this village. Each case was independent of the others and, owing to the care taken in securing isolation, the infection did not spread beyond the primary cases. In one instance it was found necessary to make use of an empty cottage in order to isolate a child, one of a large family, who was suffering from Scarlet Fever. The means taken were entirely successful.

Diphtheria.

One case only was notified. It was mild in character and presented no special difficulties.

Drainage.

The Parochial Committee are to be congratulated on the action they are taking to provide the Village with a proper system of sewerage and sewage disposal. Up to the present Thorpe has depended on cesspools which have been the source of endless trouble and the cause of a class of nuisance most difficult to deal with.

Owing to the peculiar configuration of Thorpe many difficulties are presented in the carrying out any scheme of sewerage, power being a necessity both for collecting the sewage as well as for pumping it to the outfall.

In July last Mr. Arthur J. Martin M.Inst.C.E., was consulted and in September presented a report detailing a scheme which, after much consideration and some alteration was adopted by the Parochial Committee.

It is hoped that the work will be commenced during the coming Summer.

Scavenging

The Scavenger carried out his duties in a satisfactory manner. Covered iron dust-bins are now very commonly employed in the place of the ordinary brick receptacle for refuse. This change has lightened the work of the Scavenger and is in every way an improvement.

New Buildings.

There have been no extensive building operations in this village during the year. Two plans only have been submitted. One of these was for a new residence, and the other for the conversion of four cottages into a residence.

FACTORIES & WORKSHOPS ACT 1901

The District being agricultural, factories and workshops are few in number, and such as there are do not call for much attention as to their sanitation. They principally consist of wheelwrights' shops, brickfields etc., where the greater part of the work is carried out in the open air.

There are no "home-workers" in the District.

I have the honour to remain,
Your obedient Servant,
H. H. BACK.

Medical Officer of Health to
the Blofield Rural District Council.

Acc. Norfolk
March 1908

